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News Release

Keep Warm, but Beware “The Silent Killer”

CHICAGO – As dangerously low temperatures persist throughout the Midwest, the U.S. Department of Homeland Security’s Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA) wants individuals and families to remain heat safe, and avoid the dangers of carbon monoxide (CO).

“Carbon monoxide—often called “the silent killer”— is a poisonous gas you cannot see, taste, or smell,” said Region V Administrator Andrew Velasquez III. “We encourage everyone to stay warm as these subfreezing temperatures continue throughout the area, but do so safely when heating homes, businesses and vehicles.”

Carbon monoxide poisoning often results from faulty furnaces or other heating appliances, portable generators, water heaters, clothes dryers or cars left running in garages. Symptoms of poisoning can include headache, nausea and drowsiness, while exposure to high levels can be fatal.

Stay heat safe by taking the following precautions:

- Choose a CO alarm from a recognized testing laboratory and follow manufacturer’s instructions for placement and mounting. Test these alarms at least once a month.
- Have fuel-burning heating equipment (fireplaces, furnaces, water heaters, wood stoves, coal stoves, space heaters and portable heaters) and chimneys inspected by a professional every year.
- Open the damper for proper ventilation before using a fireplace.
- Never use your oven or stovetop to heat your home.
- Never run a gasoline or propane heater or a grill (gas or charcoal) inside your home or an unventilated garage. The carbon monoxide gas might kill people and pets.
- Make sure all fuel-burning vented equipment is vented to the outside to avoid carbon monoxide poisoning. Keep the venting for exhaust clear and unblocked.
- If you need to warm a vehicle, remove it from the garage immediately after starting it. Make sure the exhaust pipe of a running vehicle is not blocked with snow, ice or other materials.
- Make sure vents for the dryer, furnace, stove and fireplace are clear of snow and other debris.
- Use portable generators outdoors in well-ventilated areas away from all doors, windows, vents and other building openings to prevent exhaust fumes from entering the home.

And during cold weather, remember these tips for you and your family to stay safe:

- Stay indoors as much as possible and limit your exposure to the cold;
- Dress in layers and keep dry;
- Check on family, friends, and neighbors who are at risk and may need additional assistance;
- Know the symptoms of cold-related health issues such as frostbite and hypothermia and seek medical attention if health conditions are severe.
- Bring your pets indoors or ensure they have a warm shelter area with unfrozen water.
- Make sure your vehicle has an emergency kit that includes an ice scraper, blanket and flashlight – and keep the fuel tank above half full.

You can find more information and tips on being ready for winter weather and extreme cold temperatures at <http://www.ready.gov/winter>.

FEMA's mission is to support our citizens and first responders to ensure that as a nation we work together to build, sustain, and improve our capability to prepare for, protect against, respond to, recover from, and mitigate all hazards.

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